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# SHOULD WE READ BAVINCK'S THE PHILOSOPHY OF REVELATION<sup>1</sup> AS AN APOLOGETIC-OF-DESPAIR WORK?

Isaias D'Oleo Ochoa<sup>2</sup>



## ABSTRACT

In dealing with arguments against the Christian faith in his book *The Philosophy of Religion*, Herman Bavinck uses a series of argumentative strategies. One of these strategies is the apologetic of despair. This study tries to figure out whether this strategy tends to be observed in most essays of the book or its use is only circumstantial.

## KEYWORDS

Apologetics of Despair; Argumentative Strategies; Culture and Christianity; Philosophy of Religion, Reformed Apologetics.

## INTRODUCTION

Gordon Graham in his essay, "Bavinck's Philosophy of Revelation," explores Bavinck's implicit intellectual context, and among other aspects, argues that in the essay titled "Revelation and History" Bavinck confronts Nietzsche with a *reductio ad absurdum*.<sup>3</sup> Willem H. de Wit, analyzing Bavinck's essay "Revelation and the Future," concludes that

<sup>1</sup> Nota do editor: A obra de Herman Bavinck, *The Philosophy of Revelation*, foi traduzida para o Português com o título *A Filosofia da Revelação*. Cf.: Herman Bavinck, *A Filosofia da Revelação* (Brasília: Editora Monergismo, 2019).

<sup>2</sup> Isaias D'Oleo Ochoa é pastor na Reformed Church of America (PCA), mestre em Teologia (Th.M) e doutorando (Ph.D) em Teologia Filosófica pelo Calvin Theological Seminary.

<sup>3</sup> Gordon Graham, "Bavinck's Philosophy of Revelation," *Calvin Theological Journal* 45 (1), 2010: 49-50. Graham is Henry Luce III Professor of Philosophy and the Arts at Princeton Theological Seminary.

Bavinck also used a *reductio ad absurdum* argument.<sup>4</sup> It seems that when discussing difficult topics that affect the Christian faith, Bavinck confronts those discussions using a *reductio ad absurdum* argument—one of the three elements that de Wit identifies as necessary for an apologetic-of-despair argumentative strategy. Besides arguing that Bavinck uses a *reductio ad absurdum* argument in his concluding lecture, “Revelation and the Future,” of his book *The Philosophy of Revelation*, de Wit also concludes that Bavinck meets all the criteria, and that the whole book might be characterized as an apologetic of despair.<sup>5</sup>

Because Bavinck himself is critical of apologetics, and *The Philosophy of Revelation*<sup>6</sup> is a collection of lectures dealing with different major topics related to biblical revelation, I am interested to analyze other essays in Bavinck’s *The Philosophy of Revelation* to confirm de Wit’s assessment. To put it differently, I will try to answer the following question: Does Bavinck tend to use an apologetic-of-despair strategy in *The Philosophy of Revelation*?

In Part I, this essay offers de Wit’s definition of the apologetic-of-despair strategy and makes an exposition of de Wit’s assessment of Bavinck’s *The Philosophy of Revelation* in terms of the alleged apologetic nature of the work. In Part II, this paper explores three essays of *The Philosophy of Religion* to figure out the use of an apologetic-of-despair strategy by Bavinck. The essays are “Revelation and Nature,” “Revelation and Religious Experience,” and “Revelation and Culture.” It is the thesis of this paper that despite noticing that Bavinck’s arguments in *The Philosophy of Revelation* might display a certain apologetic nature, the use of an apologetic-of-despair technique in

<sup>4</sup> Willem J. de Wit, “Apologetics of Despair,” in *On the Way to the Living God: A Cathartic Reading of Herman Bavinck and An Invitation to Overcome the Plausibility Crisis of Christianity* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2011), 77. For further discussion of Bavinck’s Essay “Revelation and the Future,” please read Brian G. Mattson, “Bavinck’s ‘Revelation and the Future’: A Centennial Retrospective,” *The Kuyper Center Review*, Volume 2: *Revelation and Common Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011): 126–54.

<sup>5</sup> De Wit, “Apologetics of Despair,” 76–77. Wit acknowledges that his paper did not analyze the whole book but focused on the last lecture (62). In footnote #44, Wit clarifies the issue of how this last lecture can be read as the conclusion of the book as a whole, or as an independent lecture. According to Graham, the support for this is found in the fact “Revelation and the Future” did not belong to the original Stone Lectures. Graham, “Bavinck’s *Philosophy of Revelation*,” 45.

<sup>6</sup> Herman Bavinck, *The Philosophy of Revelation: The Stone Lectures for 1908–1909*, Princeton Theological Seminary (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1908). For a brief explanation of the context of these lectures, see James Bratt, “The Context of Herman Bavinck’s Stone Lectures: Culture and Politics in 1908,” *The Bavinck Review* (1), 2010: 4–24. For a review of Bavinck’s work here discussed, see William Brenton Green, Jr., “Review of *The Philosophy of Revelation* by Herman Bavinck,” *The Princeton Theological Review* 7, no. 4 (1909): 657–61.

Bavinck's essays is incidental and limited insofar that Bavinck employs other strategies in dealing with serious challenges to the Christian faith.

## **DE WIT'S DEFINITION OF AN APOLOGETIC OF DESPAIR AND HIS ASSESSMENT OF BAVINCK'S THE PHILOSOPHY OF REVELATION**

De Wit analyses the last lecture of *The Philosophy of Revelation* titled "Revelation and the Future," and discovers that the main argument of this lecture seems to be of an apologetic nature (DE WIT, 2011, p. 70). De Wit suggests that Bavinck's *The Philosophy of Revelation* as a whole can also be read as an apologetic-of-despair. De Wit acknowledges that Bavinck himself did not claim such a thing. Nevertheless, he believes that *The Philosophy of Revelation* may perhaps be an apologetic work, something he has taken from the German edition of the book. De Wit argues that the summary of the German edition points towards such a notion (DE WIT, 2011, p. 65). It is noteworthy to mention that in his critique of 1903 B. B. Warfield observes a lack of emphasis on apologetics in Bavinck's works, especially in *The Certainty of Faith*. In that regard, Warfield's critique seems to contradict de Wit's suggestion.

After discussing this issue briefly, de Wit argues that the apparent contradiction can be solved by holding that Bavinck and Warfield differ in the kind of apologetics they do. De Wit states,

If the argument of Bavinck's lectures or at least the final lecture can be characterized as an apologetic of despair, it does indeed differ from Warfield's approach. An apologetic of despair is at variance with both negative and positive apologetics in that it does not concentrate on specific arguments in favor of or against Christianity, but on an alleged alternative to the Christian faith. It attempts to show that this alternative is—perhaps intellectually but in any case existentially— untenable: if it were true, we would be in an utterly hopeless situation. Such an analysis of the alternative does not prove the gospel but can create a new openness to it (DE WIT, 2011, p. 67).

De Wit's argument seems to be plausible and would solve the apparent contradiction between the assumed apologetic characteristic

of Bavinck's *The Philosophy of Revelation* and Warfield's assessment on Bavinck's approach to apologetics in general. Nonetheless, a significant issue emerges: Wit recognizes that Bavinck's use of the term "despair" in Dutch is minimal. Wit reports at least one finding in *The Philosophy of Revelation* and two in *Reformed Dogmatics* (DE WIT, 2011, p. 67). This proof does not reveal so much, yet it is noteworthy.

De Wit moves on to offer another argument to back up his claim: Bavinck's understanding of Pascal's *Pensees*. Since Pascal in his *Pensees* develops an apologetic-of-despair strategy, de Wit analyzes how Bavinck views Pascal. De Wit reports that Bavinck does not assess Pascal's work directly but only offers "a general evaluation of the ethical-psychological method. He esteems the emphasis on the correspondence between religion as an objective historical power and the moral needs of human beings... However, he also stresses that this method is insufficient to be the one and the only." (DE WIT, 2011, p. 68). After offering a brief discussion and some references from *Reformed Dogmatics* and *The Philosophy of Revelation*, Wit argues that Bavinck tends to view Pascal "with assent and without criticism" and that he indeed "seems to endorse an apologetic of despair that attempts to create a new openness to the hope of the gospel, if only it does not attempt to create a new gospel based on our needs." (DE WIT, 2011, p. 69). De Wit argues that despite Warfield's critical assessment of Bavinck's apparent lack of apologetics, *The Philosophy of Religion* can be read as an apologetic work (DE WIT, 2011, p. 70). After analyzing the argument of "Revelation and the Future," Wit strengthens his argument and asserts that Bavinck's argumentative strategy follows an apologetic-of-despair approach (DE WIT, 2011, pp. 76-77).

### **Interlude: Definition of Apologetics of Despair**

Based on Lee Hardy's development of the topic, De Wit defines an apologetic of despair as the "attempt to push the assumptions of the secular worldview to the point where that worldview becomes untenable, to trace out the logic of atheism to its bitter and presumably unacceptable conclusions, thereby creating a new openness to the hope of the Gospel" (DE WIT, 2011, p. 63). To such end, Wit offers a three-fold assessment to determine whether an apologetic-of-despair

strategy is used. In his understanding, an apologetics of despair: a) addresses opposing worldviews to the Christian faith such as an atheistic or secular worldviews; b) uses a *reductio ad absurdum* argument to demonstrate that an argument is false; and c) such an *reductio ad absurdum* argument has existential implications (DE WIT, 2011, p. 63). In this respect, the purpose of an apologetic-of-despair approach is to offer a new hope for embracing the gospel in contrast of the view addressed which leads to despair and hopelessness.

## **THE USE OF APOLOGETICS IN BAVINCK'S OTHER ESSAYS**

### **Essay "Revelation and Nature"**

Although this essay, which represents the fourth chapter of *The Philosophy of Revelation* (BAVINCK, 1908, pp. 83-112), seems to have two of the three constituting aspects described by de Wit of an apologetic-of-despair argument, this position is not accurate. Bavinck does address the mechanistic and monistic understanding of the world and discusses the existential implications of adopting those failing systems, highlighting the key role of Christianity for science. Nonetheless, these systems do not represent full worldviews but merely theories. Besides, faith and science must not oppose each other in Bavinck's line of thought.

In "Revelation and Nature," Bavinck studies the relation of biblical revelation and nature arguing that science is unable to explain all natural phenomena in the world. Although science is independent from theology, the "dualism [between the two] is impossible." Each field concentrates in different aspects of knowledge, but the knowledge of God concerns everyone (BAVINCK, 1908, p. 83). It might be argued that it seems Bavinck does not set up limitations of the spheres where metaphysics and science exercise their dominion. This claim, however, is not true. Bavinck does limit science. When natural sciences elevate a particular hypothesis such as evolution into a worldview, Bavinck claims that science "leaves her own domain and passes over to that of philosophy" (BAVINCK, 1908, p. 85). The problem here is not that science relies on some metaphysic claims, but the kinds of claims it relies on. In doing so, Bavinck suggests that science transgresses its own limitations and objectivity. He writes,

[Faith] maintains its demand that natural science shall retain consciousness of its limitations and that it shall not form a conception, out of the narrow sphere in which it works, in which no room is left for the soul and immortality, for intelligence and design in the world, for the existence and providence of God, for religion and Christianity" (BAVINCK, 1908, p. 85).

Although Bavinck believes that there should be a separating line between faith and science, he avoids dichotomizing the two.

Bavinck's central argument in this essay is that mechanical and scientific monist theories, for instance, cannot be the right answer to explain natural phenomena. "Only a personal God, who is both will and intelligence, can call a world into existence, which is one and yet differentiated" (BAVINCK, 1908, p. 95). Bavinck here addresses the mechanical and monist views. These theories mentioned above leave out the knowledge of God and fail to explain the diversity of the world. In Bavinck's view, without revelation the world cannot be explained at all. Rather than an apologetic-in-despair strategy, what we observe here is an inference to the best explanation argument in favor of Christianity.<sup>7</sup>

In fact, Bavinck strengthens his inference to the best explanation argument when he claims that the core of the issue between science and faith or physics and theology does not lie in the definition of nature, but on defining what God is (BAVINCK, 1908, p. 97). Monism or other philosophies cannot respond successfully to question of God because they mislead people to inadequate places such as superstition and mysticism (Cf.: BAVINCK, 1908, pp. 103-105). Bavinck states, "Man can attain to a true, free relation to nature only when he stands in his true relation to God. And this we owe to Christianity alone" (BAVINCK, 1908, pp. 105-106). Science alone is unable to respond the questioned planted. Therefore, a kind of science is needed that takes into account biblical revelation and the doctrine of creation to explain all natural phenomena.

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7 Proposed by Gilbert Harman, Inference to the best explanation is the argumentative strategy that best explains a given hypothesis or state of affairs when several explanations are possible. Harman explains it in the following way: In Inference to the best explanation, "one infers, from the fact that a certain hypothesis would explain the evidence, to the truth of that hypothesis. In general, there will be several hypotheses which might explain the evidence, so one must be able to reject all such alternative hypotheses before one is warranted in making the inference. Thus one infers, from the premise that a given hypothesis would provide a "better" explanation for the evidence than would any other hypothesis, to the conclusion that the given hypothesis is true." In Gilbert H. Harman, "The Inference to the Best Explanation," *Philosophical Review* 74 (1): 89.

There must be a unity, which lies at the bottom of all diversity. But this unity cannot be found within the world, for matter and force, spirit and matter, the physical and the psychological, the psychological and the ethical, personality and association cannot be reduced to one another; they do not exist after each other, but each with its own concept and valuation, side by side with each other. Whosoever, within the world, tries to reduce unity to multiformity, being to becoming, spirit to matter, man to nature, or the reverse, always plays false with the other half of the distinction. Thus physics calls for metaphysics; nature itself shows, in the core of its existence, that it does not exist of itself, has not been originated by evolution, but is grounded in revelation (BAVINCK, 1908, pp. 106-107).

When biblical revelation or theology is rejected, the attempts by science to explain natural phenomena lead to restlessness. Against scientific monistic theories, Bavinck appeals to an existential argument where he recognizes that despite being a powerful one, such argument “is drawn from the awful misery of the world.” Trying to solve the problem of misery and suffering, Bavinck claims that philosophy and theology have addressed this issue and have attempted to solve it offering a series of potential solutions. However, the problem is not found outside in the world, but in the human being itself. In that regard Bavinck writes:

[T]he struggle lies not between man and nature, but is fought out in the heart of man himself, between his what is and his what ought to be. The struggle is primarily of an ethical rather than of a physical nature. This is proved first of all by the fact that all the acquisitions of culture, however rich they may be, do not quiet the restlessness of the heart and are unable to silence the voice of conscience. Moreover, according to the testimony of the heroes of our race, all the misery of the world can be overcome by faith, and that is the only way which revelation—that in nature already, but far more plainly in the Scriptures—points out to us for the reconciliation of the discord (BAVINCK, 1908, p. 110).

The restlessness of the heart and human suffering and pain cannot be solved by methods offered by nature or natural science alone. Biblical revelation is needed to overcome them. As noted, Bavinck seems to use an inference to the best explanation argument in this essay to support his claims despite his argument in this essay



has existential implications. Therefore, in my view Wit's assessment does hold in Bavinck's "Revelation and Nature."

### **Essay "Revelation and Christianity"**

This is the eighth lecture of *The Philosophy of Revelation* (BAVINCK, 1908, pp. 203-241). In this essay, on one hand, we observe that Bavinck is critical of Schleiermacher's concept of revelation as a feeling of absolute dependence emphasizing the role of experience. On the other hand, Bavinck uses Schleiermacher's understanding of revelation to reformulate it according to his own theological interest. In this respect Henk Van den Belt, who in his historical Reformed study argues that truth and trust are two inseparable elements in theology, writes, "Bavinck's attitude towards Schleiermacher is ambivalent: he counts his theological position more dangerous than rationalism because it makes the human consciousness the principium of theology. Still, there is an element of truth in Schleiermacher's position" (VAN DEN BELT, 2008, p. 239).<sup>8</sup> In light of what it has been said, it seems that Bavinck does not use an apologetic-of-despair argumentative strategy in the "Revelation and Christianity" essay.

According to Bavinck, a new kind of critical philosophy emerged which emphasizes the role of the intellect (reason) over the role of the heart and will (experience). Bavinck states, "Both Descartes and Bacon established a separation between faith and reason, leaving the domain of faith to theology and satisfying themselves with a position external to it." In this way, reason then overlooked biblical revelation and later became critic a of itself (BAVINCK, 1908, p. 204).

This critical philosophy downplayed the spiritual and supernatural world in contrast to what was perceived by natural senses. In addition, the realm of faith became subject to the natural phenomena where the knowledge of God started to be built "on a new scientific, unassailable foundation" (BAVINCK, 1908, p. 206). It is for this reason that Bavinck argues that theology under this new philosophical framework has lost itself and has become a sort of a science of religion. He writes, "Theology has, since Kant's time, become theology of consciousness and experience, and thus loses itself practically

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<sup>8</sup> For overview of Bavinck's philosophical foundations, please see Eduardo J. Echeverria, "Review Essay: The Philosophical Foundations of Bavinck and Dooyeweerd," *Journal of Markets & Morality* 14, no. 2 (2011): 463-83.

in religious anthropology. In this transformation of theology into the science of religion the new conception of science comes to light.” (BAVINCK, 1908, p. 206).<sup>9</sup> Bavinck’s words seem to refer to Schleiermacher’s concept of revelation as a feeling of absolute dependence. Schleiermacher departs from the orthodox view of God and puts the object of theology not in God Himself but in another place—the human being. That is, his theological system moves its center from God to humanity. In that regard, for him the source of theology is the human experience of the Whole. Moreover, for Schleiermacher religion is not knowledge acquired by reason, or simply awareness of the world. Religion instead is an inward awareness of God experienced as an individual.

With the redefinition of science and theology under the new critical philosophy, Bavinck argues that although religion is also a matter of the heart, the usage of the term ‘experience’ in religious and theology differs from its meaning in science: experience in theology means that religion is a “personal matter through and through” (BAVINCK, 1908, p. 207). Bavinck then claims that religious experience must emerge first from revelation and not vice versa. He writes, “Experience does not come first, after which interpretation follows, but revelation precedes, as in experienced in faith” (BAVINCK, 1908, p. 208). As observed, biblical revelation and the knowledge of God must go together and cannot be separated: “Religion is without a doubt a matter of the heart; but it cannot be separated from all objective knowledge of God through his revelation in nature and history, in Scripture and conscience” (BAVINCK, 1908, p. 208). With this assertion, reflecting perhaps the main argument of the essay, Bavinck shows his interest in including religious experience into his understanding of revelation, but without ruling out the role of reason in theology.

After arguing against the separation of experience and reason in religion, Bavinck proceeds to claim that psychology is unable to explain the spiritual world and religious phenomena. Revelation is then necessary to do so. Again, Bavinck’s strategy here is an inference

<sup>9</sup> For further discussion on Bavinck’s science of religion, see Henk van de Belt, *Religion as Revelation? The Development of Herman Bavinck’s View from a Reformed Orthodox to a Neo-Calvinist Approach*, *The Bavinck Review* 4 (2013): 9-31.  
See Friedrich Schleiermacher, “First Speech: Apology,” in *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers* (Cambridge, England; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press), 1996.

to the best explanation. Bavinck affirms that Christianity constitutes the true religion because it locates religion in the context of God alone—acknowledging of the true God, trust him, love and honor him, etc. Then, God is not merely the content of religion, but also the subject of it (BAVINCK, 1908, p. 222). Human beings relate integrally, body and soul, to God so there is no need to downplay the role of the heart and will. In this respect Bavinck states, “[T]he whole man is taken into fellowship with that one true God; not only his feelings, but also his mind and will, his heart and all his affections, his soul and his body” (BAVINCK, 1908, p. 222). One sees here again a reference to the Schleiermacherian notion of revelation which Bavinck tries to locate in his theological thought.

After Bavinck partially appropriates Schleiermacher’s notion of revelation and religion, he moves on to discuss theology as an independent science and as a field who has its own methodology. It is significant to his paper that Bavinck does not reject the fact that religion has an experiential element in it. What he rejects is that religion should be understood solely in those terms. “[K]nowledge belongs so intimately to the essence of religion that religion, if freed from all religious representations and limited purely to feeling, would immediately lose its own character. For feeling has in itself no content and no quality; religious, ethical, and aesthetic feelings do not exist independently of each other,” Bavinck writes (BAVINCK, 1908, p. 226). Reason is a necessary element in theology as well because “the formal part of dogmatics... cannot proceed here by mere speculation” (BAVINCK, 1908, p. 226). Bavinck argues that Christian religion is not merely a matter of the heart. It is also linked to Christian history and objectivity.

As noted, Wit’s three-fold assessment seems not to hold in the “Revelation and Religious Experience” essay. Bavinck does not reject completely Schleiermacher’s concept of revelation and his emphasis on religious experience but appropriates it partially. Instead of rejecting it completely or using an apologetic-of-despair argumentative strategy, Bavinck uses the technique of appropriation and inference to the best explanation argument when dealing with this issue.

## **Essay “Revelation and Culture”**

The essay “Revelation and Culture,” which represents the ninth chapter of *The Philosophy of Revelation* (BAVINCK, 1908, pp. 242-269), seems not to follow an apologetic-of-despair argument. Although Bavinck assesses the ethical values of modern culture to claim the superiority of the supernaturalistic character of the Christian faith, he does not reject culture in favor of the gospel. Instead, he argues that it is the gospel which restores culture.

Regarding the relation between religion and culture, Bavinck begins his essay claiming that the Christian ascetic life started from the need to protect the Christian faith from “a world which had...its own life.” Such worldly life was characterized by “heathen practices that Christians could take little part in it without denying their faith.” Some of these practices were second-century dualistic and ascetic Gnosticism and the later embracement of Stoic and Neoplatonic philosophies in Christian thought. To deal with this, some forms of Christianity tended to develop monastic life which separated culture and faith (BAVINCK, 1908, pp. 242-244).

Bavinck argues that “culture in the broadest sense... includes all the labor which human power expends on nature. But this nature is twofold; it includes not only the whole visible world of phenomena which is outside man, but also, in a wider sense, man himself” (BAVINCK, 1908, p. 249). There are, for Bavinck, two main areas with which culture deals. The first is human activities which deal “with the production and distribution of material goods, such as agriculture, cattle-rearing, industry, and trade.” The second is human labor by which the human being “realizes objectively his ideas of the true, the good, and the beautiful, by means of literature and science, justice and statecraft” (BAVINCK, 1908, p. 250). Bavinck claims that this culture has existed since the very beginning of the creation of humankind. Bavinck here connects culture and religion. He writes,

[F]rom its first origin culture has been closely connected with religion; in all ages and among all peoples these two are found together, and go forward hand in hand. It was not till the eighteenth century that culture was raised to a power which emancipated itself from the Christian religion and the whole ancient worldview, and

sought to become an absolutely new, modern culture" (BAVINCK, 1908, p. 250).

As observed, this is the main argument Bavinck offers in "Revelation and Culture" where he addresses the strong separation of culture vs. religion.

Arguing that modern culture is not a finished construct and is always developing, Bavinck moves on further and makes an assessment of the Netherlands' society at the end of the nineteenth century. He comes to the conclusion that asserting that the Christian faith and culture are opposites is problematic. Bavinck rejects dichotomizing Christianity and culture, state and society, marriage and family, for instance (BAVINCK, 1908, p. 253). In that regard, Bavinck argues that it is the "heteronomy and transcendence" of Christianity which seems to oppose culture (BAVINCK, 1908, p. 253), a heteronomy reflected in the key supernaturalist aspect of the Christian faith (BAVINCK, 1908, pp. 254-255).

Bavinck defends the position that Christianity "is the pure and true religion, it is not less, but more supernatural than all other religions" (BAVINCK, 1908, pp. 254-255). It is worth mentioning that he adopted this position against other religions and not against culture itself. For Bavinck, the gospel represents the most significant aspect of culture because it is the guiding principle of culture itself. A materialistic and naturalistic framework replacing Christianity in order to interpret culture is the real issue here. This concurs with Bavinck's main argument of his essay: "[I]t is historically proved that culture has not had an independent origin and development, but from its first commencement is bound up with religion in the closest way. The higher elements of culture especially, such as science, art, and morality, are indebted to religion for their origin and growth" (BAVINCK, 1908, p. 259).

In regard to the heteronomical character of Christianity, Bavinck argues that all ethical systems are heteronomous. But it is Christian morality alone that "makes true culture possible, and places it on a firm foundation" (BAVINCK, 1908, pp. 262-263). Ethical culture recognizes, according to Bavinck, the goodness of the human being, but is powerless to renew him. While ethical culture thinks it is sufficient,

there is still a problem. It is theonomy what reconciles the human being's autonomy and heteronomy (BAVINCK, 1908, p. 263). Human beings are only "means for the glorifying of God" (BAVINCK, 1908, p. 264). In this sense, the resurrection of Christ "is the fundamental restoration of all culture" (BAVINCK, 1908, p. 267).

Bavinck concludes his essay arguing that rejecting the Christ described in the New Testament in favor of the historical Jesus leads to asceticism and a dichotomy between nature vs. grace and creation versus re-creation, among other aspects. In Bavinck's view, all these positions are "in direct contradiction to Christianity" (BAVINCK, 1908, p. 268). Because Christianity does not depend on what culture creates but relies on the gospel which "gives us a standard by which we can judge of phenomena and events," Bavinck claims that Christianity and Christian nations "are still guardians of culture" (BAVINCK, 1908, p. 269).

As noted, Wit's three-fold assessment seems not to hold in in Bavinck's "Revelation and Culture." The Christian faith—based on revelation—gives culture its reason to exist. Bavinck rejects not culture itself, but the interpretation systems which interpret culture in ways that contradict Christian truths. In addition, the separation of culture and faith seems not to lead to despair, but to some theological positions that are important but seem not to have existential implications.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Bavinck does not reject at once and for all the ideas that may be detrimental to the faith, but instead, he engages with them in order to discover if they can offer some truth worth noting. In this respect, in the three essays discussed in this paper one observes Bavinck contending against some positions on different topics, and in some of them, one may note a certain apologetic nature, especially when he discards the contrary position in favor of the Christian faith. Nevertheless, it might be too much to expect Bavinck to employ an apologetic-of-despair strategy in every essay on every topic. The fact that he does employ it in some instances, as de Wit suggests it, shows Bavinck has some sympathy for this strategy.

In my view, Bavinck's arguments in *The Philosophy of Revelation* does tend to display an apologetic nature. Nonetheless, the use of an apologetic-of-despair strategy in this work is incidental and limited insofar that Bavinck employed other strategies such as appropriation and the inference to best explanation when dealing with some of the challenges to the Christian faith.

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## **RESUMO**

Ao lidar com argumentos contra a fé cristã em seu livro *A Filosofia da Religião*, Herman Bavinck usa uma série de estratégias argumentativas. Uma dessas estratégias é a apologética do desespero. Este estudo tenta descobrir se essa estratégia tende a ser observada na maioria dos ensaios do livro ou se seu uso é apenas circunstancial.

## **PALAVRAS-CHAVE**

Apologética do Desespero; Estratégias argumentativas; Cultura e Cristianismo; Filosofia da Religião, Apologética Reformada.